

# **Leading for Mission in Chaotic Times**

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## Section One - Leading for Mission

### Introduction

Pope Francis, himself so filled with the joy of the Gospel, in a recent reflective apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), reminds us not only of our vocation to make the Good News of Jesus present and actual in our times, but also of the joy which properly impels a missionary community. In regard to the pressing project of making present Good News in our world, Francis throws out the challenging question – So what are we waiting for?<sup>1</sup> Leaders might well interpret the question as asking them to consider – What, if anything, is holding us back from a joy-filled response?

It seems to me that Dominican leaders are not waiting or holding back; you are picking up the challenge of the Good News. You have, for example, ‘put your foot in the water’ with the PJP (Public Juridic Person) and other initiatives, and intend to keep learning as you go, through the tried and tested process of action and reflection.

Of course the temptation in chaotic and uncertain times is always to wait until all due preparation is completed before venturing out. One always needs more information or formation than one has and there is always more work to be done to get the ‘ducks lined up’ as it were, and of course it is a fact that we are never fully ready. But, having done reasonable due diligence, leaders *must* set off, knowing that they cannot possibly come to a depth of wisdom until they have actually immersed themselves in the Gospel project, reflected on progress, acknowledged mistakes, and started anew.

I imagine there are many in and beyond the Church who assume that such important initiatives as establishing a PJP have become necessary because there is a shortage of sisters at this point of history, and that there is now a perceived need ‘to do things differently’. There is obvious truth in that. However, the reason for renewed mission initiatives runs deeper; there are much more

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, #120.

important reasons than simply responding to perceived deficit. The Church itself is undergoing, and needs to undergo what Pope Francis calls ‘a missionary transformation’.<sup>2</sup> There are two areas we need to consider if we are to understand what is at stake here. One is ‘mission’, and one is what was termed in the Second Vatican Council the ‘universal call to holiness’ which is documented at the heart of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.<sup>3</sup> Both *mission and the universal call to holiness* provide important clues about the ‘why’ of the new organisational entity, the PJP, and other initiatives being taken. All are called equally to holiness, albeit through a variety of paths. I would ask you to keep this complementarity of mission and the universal call to holiness in mind as I make some points about mission.

As we progress through our time together this morning, I intend firstly to say something about mission and where the world-wide Catholic community is at in regard to the articulation of mission in our Catholic faith tradition. I then want to say something about the nature of our times and also about culture with a view to highlighting some of the leadership challenges which mission presents to us at present. The latter topic is important because to be human is to be a person-within-culture. That is the only kind of humanity we share. To be human is also to be a person-within-history, so we need to know the nature of our times and where we are located historically, which shapes how we need to engage in the privilege of being Good News communities.

## **Mission**

Because ‘mission’ is used in many ways and can seem a confusing term, I find it useful to explain religious mission in terms of ‘purpose’, that is the same meaning as it has in the wider society. Religious mission is very much about the purpose, or *raison d’être* of the Church, why communities such as yours are here in the first place. In speaking of the purpose of the Church on earth I am bearing in mind that it is both institution and community. I will return to this two-fold aspect of Church towards the end of the address.

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<sup>2</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, Chapter One.

<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium* Chapter Five.

Although as we shall see, mission is nowadays reclaimed as a core value of Catholicism - so core indeed as to be seen to arise from and express its very nature - awareness of the centrality of mission to the nature and life of the Church had in recent centuries been lost. During this time mission functioned as a kind of Department of Foreign Affairs in the Church - a department staffed by specialists and quite separate from ordinary Church life. An inadequate theology of mission developed which has left us with a most disastrous rift between what has been termed the pastoral life of the Church (looking after the faithful), and mission (which takes the community beyond itself in doing the work of Jesus). This rift did not exist in the communities out of which the Gospels came. They would have found such a dichotomy incomprehensible. The communities out of which the Gospels came were shaped by complex missional contexts, and this created challenges for leaders because of pressures created within the group. These leaders responded by retelling the story of Jesus in such a way as to address the challenges which both mission and community life presented in very demanding circumstances. Hence each of the Gospels has its own particular character and theology. Nor did the dichotomy between pastoral and missional aspects of the Church's nature exist through most of the centuries of the Church's life. *The pastoral work of the Church is part of its mission.* All aspects are part of actualising God's purpose in the world. We need to build up the community of the faithful so that its members can effectively engage in mission, and we leaders are called to accompany and lead them as we go about mission.

To get a handle on mission and its contemporary goals, let us track back quickly over the recent Catholic journey in regard to mission understanding - at least since the Second Vatican Council - using key documents which represent a shared self-understanding across the Church, and also reflect, to more or less degree, life 'on the ground'.

(a) Vatican 11

*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* - is essentially a missional document despite its name since it deals with the relationship of the Church to the world.

*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* – cast its discussion of the Church in terms of the kingdom parables. Based on this, there has been much development of kingdom theology since that time. The kingdom or reign of God was the term used by Jesus in describing his mission from the Father. The reign of God, whilst embracing the Church, is an overarching reality more comprehensive than the Church.

*Ad Gentes* – is a most surprising document because it set out to deal with traditional (cross-cultural) missions as people had construed them for several hundred years, and ended by opening up the conversation much more widely than was ever envisaged. The following is the key insight which rises above polemic, and gets down to the essentials:

*The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.....  
this decree..... flows from the 'fountain-like love' or charity of God the Father... (Ad Gentes 2)*

Church is a community intentionally at the service of God's mission in the universe. Since we can never claim to fully comprehend God or what God wants, the work of mission is always exploratory; it always requires openness to the Holy Spirit. Hence, *to be a Christian leader committed to mission is to be an explorer*. That is why we called our first book on mission theology *Explorers, Guides and Meaning-makers*.

Out of this focus on mission being about God and God's life, we are now more comfortable with phrases like 'God's mission' and 'God's mission has a Church'.<sup>4</sup> We are thus expressing our understanding that the Church is at the service of a wider mission, and its own mission is to be at this service. Unfortunately, all too often one sees mission cast in terms of increasing Church numbers, almost as if this were an end in itself. This is important, but it is not as an end in itself. One of mission's goals is to build up the

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<sup>4</sup> This theme has been developed by Stephen Bevans in a number of places. See for example Stephen Bevans *The Mission Has a Church: An Invitation to the Dance*  
[aejt.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/197644/Bevans\\_Mission\\_Has\\_Church.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/197644/Bevans_Mission_Has_Church.pdf)

community of disciples *so as to be more effectively at the disposal of God's mission or purpose in the created universe.*

Finally we must mention a very short document, *Nostra Aetate*, which might well prove over the longer term to be one of the most important of the Council. It is the one which opened up Catholics to the fact that God works with and in all people of goodwill, and that we should value and respect the many ways human beings find their way to God, seek truth, and learn spiritual wisdom, that is all religious traditions.

These documents of Vatican Council 11 set the trajectory of Catholic experience. Over the subsequent 50 years, as experience built up, the implications of those great insights began to be worked through across the life of the global Church. I tend to discern three more steps in that journey in mission effectively taking us to the present day.

(b) *Synod on Evangelisation* (1974) followed by Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) – various FORMS of mission came more clearly into focus – e.g. justice and peace-making, liberation, the evangelisation of cultures. The document contains further development of the theology of the reign of God.

(c) Pope John Paul 11's *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) from the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue – FURTHER FORMS are now included e.g. the importance of inter-religious dialogue, and the general importance of dialogue in all Gospel work. *Redemptoris Missio* reminds us that Jesus is the kingdom of God incarnate, and the disciple must keep her/his gaze on Jesus and develop a deep personal relationship. The Disciple keeps both involvement in Jesus' mission and relationship with Jesus in creative balance. We are reminded of the first words of Jesus in John's Gospel – 'What are you looking for?' (Jn 1:38). The disciples were looking for Jesus.

(d) Synod on the New Evangelisation (2012) and the subsequent summary reflection of Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013). Emphasis here was on new and creative ways of spreading the Gospel, the joy of the Gospel, and re-iterating the vocation of all in mission.

As you can see, across the past fifty years, within Roman Catholicism we have come to recognize many forms of making the joy of the Gospel present – e.g. work for justice and peace; care for creation, reconciliation, evangelisation of cultures, inculturation, interreligious dialogue and dialogue with those who hold secular faiths.

Most fundamentally, we have learned that dialogue is not just one of the forms of Gospel work; *it is one of the fundamentals*, sitting alongside proclamation of the Gospel (by word and witness).

Whatever area of Gospel work we are called to, we ought be open to and supportive of all contemporary forms, since all are needed to make the Gospel present and credible in the human situation. Also we always need to ask, in whatever area we are involved in – ‘Who are our dialogue partners?’

In summary –

- (i) Let us remember that it is God’s mission which gives our Church its self-understanding and its very *raison d’être*. We are greatly privileged to be called into that mission through discipleship of Jesus.
- (ii) Mission is, therefore, a very comprehensive reality. It takes many forms.
- (iii) All are called to holiness equally and achieve this through involvement in God’s mission, an involvement flowing from a deep relationship with God in and through Jesus.

## **Section 2 - Leading for Mission in a Chaotic and Liminal Era**

All Christian leaders, including yourselves, today function in the confusion of a chaotic and liminal era, on the threshold of extraordinary newness. The

confusion is the result of the mega shift occurring in human consciousness impacted by globalisation and its allied phenomena - secularisation and pluralisation. These are invading all aspects of human life and radically affecting people's understanding about what it means to be human. The situation is not helped by the fact that many leaders simply do not understand these phenomena which are of such magnitude that increasingly scholars are comparing the present era to that of the period of approximately 800-200 BC – the First Axial Period - when so much which came to underpin the world as it subsequently developed in both East and West came into being. It was a time when the individuality of humans became more defined. The great world religions with their associated philosophies and moral codes came into being. The mega changes of the period embraced both East and West. The individualism which came into being during the First Axial period was patriarchal. The Second Axial Age currently upon us sees an aspiration and a movement towards the equality of all, with all humans being equally recognised for their capabilities and gifts. Of course there is a long way to go in regard to this, both in Church and in society, but this aspiration is patently present across much of the globe.

### **The Experience of Liminality**

To speak of a 'liminal era' is to invoke the language of anthropology. The word 'liminal' was famously introduced by British anthropologist, Victor Turner to describe the situation of young men during initiation rituals.<sup>5</sup> Turner describes tribal rituals during which a young man enters a 'liminal' stage in which he is no longer a child, neither is he an adult. The young men involved live in an 'in-between state', standing on the threshold of adult life.<sup>6</sup> While there may be excitement at moving forward, there is also sadness at what is being left behind, so *grieving is part of the ritual*.

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<sup>5</sup> Victor Turner *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* was first published in 1969, and is now regarded as a classic in the field. For a discussion of Turner's analysis of ritual see Gerald Arbuckle *Culture, Inculturation and the Theologians: A Post-Modern Critique* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 90ff .

<sup>6</sup> This usage is employed in psychoanalytic theory to describe the twilight state between being awake and dreaming. People here are said to be in a 'liminal state' – on the threshold of a dream.

The concept is also employed by Catholic cultural anthropologist, Gerald Arbuckle to describe a range of 'threshold experiences' that are part and parcel of the 'social drama' which accompanies major cultural change as this is experienced by individuals, organisations or whole peoples. Thus he writes:

In the ... liminality phase, a culture feels both attracted by the security of the past and the call to face the future. It is a period of sometimes anxious reflection, a search into mythological roots to obtain a sense of identity and self-worth. This can lead to outbursts of localized, excessive nationalism or delusions of grandeur, a widespread repression or denial of the realities of loss. This is a risky time because the temptation is for the culture or organization to cling tenaciously to what has been lost and simply refuse to face the future; the group can initiate a spectacular project that is totally out of touch with reality.<sup>7</sup>

The experience of liminality marks a stressful stage in the 'social drama' brought about by cultural change. While there is a certain level of excitement at the call of the future, there is also the sense of loss at what is being left behind. If an incapacity to deal with loss generates tensions, *it also releases the creative energy needed to bring about change. Liminal periods are times for decision.* This is because they are filled with an anxiety which is experienced as a crisis of meaning, and this demands decision because the stresses involved are such that people cannot live with them for long periods.

As globalisation has advanced, both religious and cultural leaders have found themselves caught up in a 'threshold experience'. Few seem clear about what a globalised world will look like, but all know beyond doubt that they are being projected, willingly or not, into that world. People grieve for a simpler age now lost. They know there can be no return to that age, but lack rituals that enable their grief to be expressed symbolically. Because of this, necessary change can be postponed or subverted.

### **Common Responses to Leadership in a Liminal Era**

#### ***Denial***

The first approach is simply to ignore what is happening and the need to make sense of it, by adopting a 'business as usual' approach and so maintaining what has been. Another form of the denial response is to launch a 'grand project' to deflect attention away from the realities of the present situation.

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald Arbuckle *Refounding the Church* (Homebush NSW: St Paul's Publications, 1993), 183.

### ***Traditionalist***

People taking a traditionalist stance make sense of the situation of liminality by 'canonising the past'. 'What was' provides the key criteria in determining 'what will be'. In this approach tradition is valued, *but the conception of it is essentially static and therefore inadequate*. While it is essential to conserve the essence of a community's tradition if the community is to survive, the traditionalist approach often allows for the preservation of *only one version of a tradition*. The leader's understanding of the tradition becomes interpreted as 'the tradition'. Obviously, this approach is problematic when dealing with a living tradition, or with a plural tradition.

### ***Critical***

The critical approach adopts an iconoclastic stance to the tradition. The present is seen as owing little to the past, and the future even less still. A leader operating from a critical perspective interprets a liminal era as *one in which a point of discontinuity has been reached*, one in which 'what was' no longer provides the model for 'what is' or 'what needs to be'. The leader is therefore free to choose his or her own course in a tradition-free space. However, the problem is that colleagues are also free to choose their own course in this space, so the exercise of leadership comes to hinge on how power is used and how power-bases are constructed.

### ***Transformative***

A fourth approach makes sense of the liminal situation by holding that there can be continuity between the past and the future because people past and present *share a common narrative*. However, as contexts change, new values, or new perspectives on perennial values emerge. Change therefore needs to occur as part of a consciously designed process in which action and reflection interact. The tradition - cultural or religious - is valued as a 'living tradition', *one in which the narrative is continuously reinterpreted*. The transformative approach allows change to occur in the depth dimensions of the culture. This leads, in turn, to major reshaping at the surface level. However, the past is not forgotten; it is seen as an earlier chapter in an ongoing story that values, includes and makes sense of the group's collective experience without being confined to a single

interpretation of that experience. Understanding the tradition as 'living' is transformative because it permits grieving over loss, while legitimating change. Rituals of loss are seen as important aspects of the transformation process.

In almost any community today, consciously or sub-consciously, people hold one or other of these four positions, sometimes oscillating between them. The dilemma for leaders is that there is some substance in all four positions. Difficulties arise for the leader because people holding these positions have, quite legitimately, different expectations of what an organization can achieve.

### **Leadership as a Ministry of Meaning-making**

If leaders are to be effective in negotiating the dilemmas posed by a liminal era, they have to be able to make sense of it for themselves and then for those they lead. An important skill in this task is discerning the *imaginal horizon* within which colleagues customarily function, and challenging them to move beyond this horizon.

Culture limits what we see as options but, because we take culture for granted, we do not realise this is occurring. Australian culture and Church culture both function in this way. Challenging the imaginal boundaries imposed by these cultures becomes important in opening up the paths to new solutions and new possibilities. Leaders create the spaces in which cultures can develop and renew themselves. The task is not an easy one and requires leaders to make this journey of imagination themselves before inviting others to set out for the new lands that have been encountered. Catholic leadership is a journey made in faith – and that is its essential challenge.

In a liminal era meaning-making becomes part and parcel of the mission and ministry of leadership. Like all forms of ministry, this has a requisite skill-set. A primary skill is the ability to read contexts and to understand the dynamics that are driving change in both the religious and cultural arenas. Secondly, it involves understanding the role and function of narrative, ritual and symbolism both in helping followers move beyond the taken-for-granted and the familiar, and helping them grieve for what has been left behind. Missional leadership, understood in terms of meaning-making, therefore reaches beyond the cognitive

to address both the affective and evaluative dimensions of life. We see an example of this meaning-making in the treatment of the suffering servant in Philippians 2:6-11.<sup>8</sup>

### **Section Three - Culture, Culture-Shaping and Leadership**

It is important that we spend some of our time on culture because (i) as leaders you are revamping Dominican culture at this time, and (ii) because culture is a vital source of wisdom and must be befriended 'warts and all' in the ministry of meaning-making which is a major responsibility of Catholic school and system leadership.

The points being made about culture apply equally both to the broader societal culture and to the culture of organisations and institutions.

When leaders try to engage with complex notions like culture, it is necessary to use what Gerald Egan terms 'working models'. Working models are complex enough to embrace most features of the topic under discussion, and simple enough to direct action and thus to assist with outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

#### ***Modern model of culture - two schools of thought***

Having originated in the nineteenth century, cultural anthropology (the study of culture) is a relatively new social science, but it is one on which mission studies draws extensively, not surprisingly since it is the study of the human person within her/his way of life and to be human is to be a person-within-culture. Up until recently (the 1980s), cultures were thought of as *more or less comprehensive and enduring wholes*, and were understood either as *organisms* or as *structures*. Schools of anthropology developed around each of these two notions. Two familiar images pertinent to this approach are still useful to us to this day, especially in terms of taking a snapshot in time. These are the images of an onion and an iceberg. Each of these images helps us to see that most of what constitutes culture lies outside of awareness. This is important because

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<sup>8</sup> Jim and Therese D'Orsa *Leading for Mission: Integrating Life, Culture and Faith in Catholic Education* (Mulgrave: Garratt Publishing, 2013), 74-78.

<sup>9</sup> See Gerard Egan *Change Agent Skills in Helping and Human Service Settings* (Monterey: Brookes/Cole Publishing, 1985), 6.

when we are trying to reshape culture we are dealing with the deepest stories, symbols, values and understandings about who we are, and we are not usually fully aware of even the existence of these.

An assumption of this early approach to anthropology is that it is an *explanatory science*, and therefore cultures can be studied objectively, that is 'put under the microscope', so that relationships can be established and predictions made.

### ***Post-modern critique***

All working models are based on assumptions that may hold at a certain time and in a certain context, but which break down as times and contexts change, so that the model has to be revised or replaced. The modern understanding of culture fits this pattern. Disquiet with the modern model accelerated in the 1980s giving rise to an alternative model now called, for want of a better term, the post-modern model. It emerged in response to what is known as the post-modern critique of all things 'modern'. It contains some useful insights for our work of leadership.

Since the late 1970s, the post-modern critique has taken three principal directions:

- critique of the way in which *power was used* in modernity to define what constituted knowledge
- critique of the *meta-narratives of modernity* (communism, scientism, liberalism, fascism and capitalism) as overarching narratives about human history within which their proponents claimed that all local narratives were to be interpreted
- critique of the way in which modernity *imposed uniformity and undervalued difference*.

In the modern model, cultures are seen as *more or less clearly defined*. They serve the important social function of creating the boundary between 'us' and 'not us'. In the early twentieth century this may well have been a good description of the social reality. However, as communication technologies have advanced, and the possibility of rapid travel extended to more and more people, the social boundaries between 'us' and 'not us' in most Western cultures have become

blurred. It was in this context that the need for an alternative understanding of culture and its dynamics developed.<sup>10</sup>

Not only was the modern model of culture put under the microscope by the post-modern critics, so too were the understandings of anthropology on which it rested. New schools of thought arose that understood anthropology as an *interpretive science* and rejected its role as an explanatory science. As an interpretive science, anthropology's major concern is with how *a people or group negotiates meaning*.

### ***Post-modern anthropology – Dynamism of culture***

Post-modern anthropologists hold that culture is a *much more dynamic reality* than the modern model suggests. Without going into the various schools of thought, which is beyond the scope of today's work, what was occurring was discussion about *how one interprets the data one is dealing with*. The anthropologist is now aware that s/he brings their own meaning system to bear and, if not careful, will impose it when interpreting cultural data, irrespective of what that data means for the people being studied. There is therefore need for a high degree of reflexivity when approaching cultural data. Outsiders must be aware of their own assumptions, and also work with insiders.

### ***Webs of Significance***

For a famous proponent of this approach, Clifford Geertz, people don't 'have a culture'; they are immersed in it. He speaks of culture as a 'web of significance'.<sup>11</sup>

When interpreting cultural data it is important to realise that the parts have meaning only in relationship with the whole, and the whole takes on new meaning as we study the parts. For example, in Australian culture the value 'everyone is entitled to a fair go' stands in relationship to other values rather than alone, and its place in the 'web' throws light on the limits within which it applies. Another such value is that, given a fair go, everyone should also pull their weight. An associated value might be that, when dealing with vulnerable

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<sup>10</sup> For a good introduction to this concept see Kathryn Tanner *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997) or Gerald Arbuckle *Culture, Inculturation and the Theologians: A Post Modern Critique* (Collegeville Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Arbuckle, Chapter 2 'Cultures as Webs of Symbols and Myths' in *Culture, Inculturation and Theologians*, 19-36.

young people, we Australians go the extra mile. The relationship between the web and the particular value becomes a matter of interpretation, and is something that is contested by insiders to the culture. How such contests are resolved tells us important things about how the culture functions. So for leaders, the advice is to be aware of the web of significance you are weaving as you reshape the culture of your organisation.

Here we come to some very important matters for Dominican leaders to consider. In this postmodern perspective, the way in which contests over meaning are resolved reflects the often hidden manipulation of *power within the culture*, the ways in which power is used within a culture to legitimate knowledge, feelings and norms.

Arbuckle offers the following 'post-modern' definition of culture:

A culture is a pattern of meanings

- encased in a network of symbols, myths, narratives and rituals,
- created by individuals and subdivisions, (groups within a culture) as they struggle to respond to the competitive pressures of power and limited resources in a rapidly globalizing and fragmenting world,
- and instructing adherents about what is considered to be the correct way to feel, think, and behave<sup>12</sup>.

Note the important issues of meaning-making and the use of power which would not have found a place in earlier definitions of culture.

### ***Operation of theme and counter-theme in cultures***

In the post-modern approach, cultural values, for example social justice, do not exist in a stand-alone form as the modern model suggests. Rather, they are present within cultures as *theme and counter-theme*. Theme and counter-theme represent competing goods that exist in tension, and between which a balance has to be struck. These competing goods – theme and counter-theme - are *both affirmed* within cultural myths and narratives. However, if taken to extremes, the pursuit of one restricts or denies the pursuit of the other. Power is used in a battle to determine where the balance point lies, and the battleground is meaning.

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<sup>12</sup> Arbuckle, 17. Words in brackets not in the original.

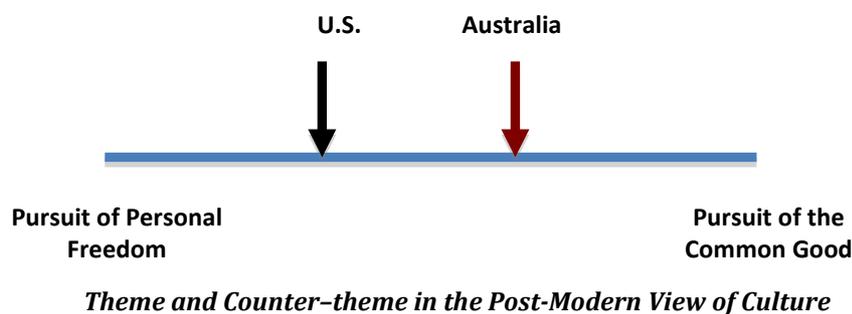
### ***An Illustration***

In most Western societies, the pursuit of personal freedom and the pursuit of the common good stand as theme and counter-theme in the value of a good and just society.

#### ***'Pursuit of the common good' and 'personal freedom'***

In Australian culture and in the cultures of the United States, for example, these values are understood in different ways, and people living in the respective cultures set the balance point differently.

In Australian culture universal health care is taken for granted in 'pursuit of the common good'. Australians at this point of history find it hard to comprehend the situation in the U.S. where universal health care is a hotly contested political issue because certain modes of its provision are seen to encroach on individual freedom. Citizens in Australia understand the 'social contract' between themselves and government in a somewhat different way from many of their contemporaries in the U.S.



It is worth noting at this stage that a cultural value can be given such status in a culture that its counter-value is suppressed. This happened in the West in the late modern era, for instance, when the scientific method was adopted as the sole method of human enquiry legitimating knowledge, with the result that other forms of human enquiry which have helped people in making sense of the world, were substantially suppressed. The processes of inter-subjective knowledge creation are now accepted as legitimate and very important, but in some quarters are still regarded as somewhat second-rate.

#### ***'Everyone deserves a fair go' and 'everyone needs to pull their weight'***

In Australian 'everyone deserves a fair go' stands as a theme. What counter-theme balances this? To get at this we need to ask: What aspiration does this value set up? Here the national narrative and myth come into play. If everyone gets a fair go, what do we expect to be the consequence? When people are perceived to have been given a fair go in the context of the Australian narrative, they are expected 'to pull their weight'. People who are given a fair go and who are not seen to be pulling their weight fall into the cultural category of 'bludger'. No one wants to feel that they are 'bludgers' or be judged to be 'bludgers'. Being so tagged is a form of cultural sanction.

In Australia culture what people will tolerate to ensure that others get 'a fair go' is balanced by their perception of what 'pulling your weight' entails, and this understanding is then qualified by the access people have to resources. There is a strong concern in Australian culture for those who are marginalised economically, particularly the young. In this culture more is expected of those with more resources.

### ***Culture and identity in the post-modern model***

In the modern model of culture, values often define the boundary between 'us' and 'not us'. 'We' value this, 'you' value that, so you are different from us. The model encompasses an 'either-or' stance to values. You are with us or against us.

The post-modern approach, which analyses cultural values in terms of theme and counter-theme takes a 'both-and' approach to values. It suggests that the 'design for living' embedded in a culture needs to acknowledge and address *the pluralism inherent in group life in a way that does not compromise identity*. The consequence of this change in stance is that cultures come to be seen as battlegrounds in which pressure groups vie to re-define theme and counter-theme and to shift the balance points between competing values in favor of their own interests. Beware of manipulating the communities you lead. It is possible to so over-emphasise one pole of the theme-counter-theme continuum, that the other becomes submerged. The leader's interpretation becomes an ideology. *The alternative is dialogue and assumes that the Holy Spirit works through and with all people of good will*. Dialogue needs to involve reflection on how our story has unfolded in the past beginning with Gospel communities. Of course this

needs to take place against a background of appropriate knowledge, and leaders have significant responsibilities in this area as well.

### **Theme and Counter-theme in New Testament Leadership Heritages**

The post-modern understanding of culture can be used to explore leadership issues in the New Testament.

The Johannine heritage was developed in the context of polemic between two Jewish groups about who Jesus was. For one group, Jesus' humanity was the most important emphasis. For the other group, Jesus' divinity was central in their understanding. The Johannine community went somewhat 'overboard' in declaring the latter at the expense of the former. Rather than keeping these two important realities in balance, the community shifted so far to one pole that eventually it split into warring factions. And, although all factions believed that the Paraclete dwelt in every believer, they lacked a mechanism to resolve the fact that believers could hold fundamentally different positions.<sup>13</sup> Brown highlights another important issue viz. that, when a position is exaggerated for whatever reason in one generation, as happened in the Johannine community, it is the exaggerated position that is passed on to the next, and unless addressed, introduces distortions into a religious tradition.<sup>14</sup> The situation of the Johannine communities out of which the Letters came seems to have been quite dire.

The author of the *Gospel of John* uses Peter and the 'beloved disciple' symbolically to define an important balance point in Christian cultures. The writer juxtaposes authority (symbolised in Peter) with discipleship (symbolised in the beloved disciple), and sets the balance point clearly on the side of discipleship. The treatment is nuanced since, when it comes to discipleship, the writer evenly balances the role of men and women, the treatment of the beloved disciple being counter-poised by treatments of Mary the mother of Jesus, and Martha and Mary, giving the very clear message that gender is not an issue in discipleship.

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<sup>13</sup> The discussion on leadership heritages in the New Testament has been inspired by Raymond Brown's *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, 123.

The writer of the *Gospel of Matthew* is also nuanced in his treatment of leadership affirming the need for authority in the community, but balancing this by also affirming the need to exercise that authority according to the standards of Jesus, particularly emphasizing the unrelenting nature of forgiveness, as we see in what is sometimes called ‘the sermon on the Church’ (Matt ch 18). Matthew thus steers his community clear of the pit of division into which the Johannine community eventually fell, as we know from the Letters.

### ***Post- modern Catholic culture***

The post-modern understanding of culture puts important questions about balance points to local Catholic cultures in looking at how important themes and counter-themes are identified. These are often recognised because they become tension points in Catholic life. These include community/institution, inclusiveness/ exclusiveness, global church/local church, unity/diversity and so on, all of which contribute to the ‘web of significance’ that is Catholic culture at the present time.

Perhaps the most culture-defining of these pairs, because it plays out at so many levels in Church life, is the tension between *Church as faith community* and *Church as global institution*.



### ***Establishing a Vital Balance Point***

In its founding configuration, the Church existed as isolated faith communities brought together under the authority of particular apostles. This structure was not sustainable once the apostles and those who knew them had died. In order to survive, the Church had to take on an institutional form independent of the communities that comprised it. While it is correct to say that Jesus founded the Church, the form the Church took once it was institutionalised is a human construct that has changed many times since its foundational configuration. While there is no question that the Church needs to have an institutional form,

equally there is no question that the deepest aspiration of its members is to be a community of communities.

The post-modern critique asks whether important values have been suppressed by the way in which the present community-institution balance is determined, and if so, what are those values. This is a pressing question for leaders who find themselves dealing with the new ways in which people define themselves as 'being Catholic' and of 'living the Gospel'. The balance point is also being determined by the low standing in which the institution is held among young people, partly as a result of the actions of delinquent priests and religious in abusing young people, but also because of the way the matter has been handled by their leaders.

Speaking of the case of school life, with which I am familiar, the pressing challenge for every leader in the present context is to ensure that, *as an institution, the school is always at the service of the community*. When an inappropriate balance point is struck, the Catholic school quickly becomes secularised and its religious message muted.

Without a clear understanding of culture and how it functions, it is simply impossible to lead effectively in situations, such as the present where the configuration of a culture, such as Australian culture changes. Similarly, it is impossible to lead effectively unless one understands, or intuits, how the culture you are shaping at the organisational level functions.

Key understandings and competencies in handling mission, the nature of our times, and culture are key competencies in responding to the Gospel. There is much work to be done on all three. We will conclude our consideration of these vital areas by acknowledging the call to go beyond where we are now. The challenge is beautifully put by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* #20:

*The word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him 'to go forth'. Abraham received the call to set out for a new land (c.f. Gen 12:1-3). Moses heard God's call: 'Go, I send you' (Ex 3:10) and led the people towards the promised land (c.f. Ex 3:17). To Jeremiah, God says, 'To all whom I send you, you shall go' (Jer 1:7). In our day Jesus' command to 'go and make disciples' echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelisation, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary 'going forth'. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel.*